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ABSTRACT

The controversy over the contrast between early childhood principles and the commercial exhibits at the 1990 annual meeting of the National Association for the Education of Young Children prompted a search for historical antecedents. Research disclosed that the first popular linking of Froebelian kindergarten curriculum and manufactured equipment was Milton Bradley's 1869 Manual for Self-Instruction and a Practical Guide for Kindergartners. Prang, Ernst Steiger, and other companies also published inexpensive books and pamphlets which showed how kindergarten materials should be used. These companies sold "authentic" Froebelian supplies and supplies that were "improved" for the American market. As early as 1879, some American educators were concerned about the corruption of educational principles by the interests of manufacturers and merchants. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, educators and school supply companies introduced new products through exhibits at the annual meetings of the National Educational Association (NEA). In 1891, brand names first appeared in the NEA reports. Educators William and Eudora Hailmann supported the concept of developmental freedom and opposed dictated activities such as those prescribed in books published by Milton Bradley and E. Steiger. But William Hailmann and the Froebelian kindergarten had little direct influence on U.S. education after the mid-1980s. (RH)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMERCIAL EXHIBIT CONTROVERSIES: 1890 AND 1990

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At our NAEYC Annual Meeting last year, a member who felt that the commercial exhibits did not reflect the goals and philosophy of this organization was vigorously applauded. As I joined in that applause, I found myself wondering how this situation had developed and when manufactured curriculum materials had first been exhibited at early childhood conferences. I decided that this was a good time to investigate the question. What I discovered seems to indicate that the years around 1890 were pivotal and that the manufacturers took over primarily because educators at that time were impressed by a "scientific approach" to education. Unlike the earlier kindergartners and schoool administrators, they not only failed to understand the developmental needs of young children but were eager to take pre-packaged solutions to kindergarten education.

First, however, we need to review just what was happening in 1890. After a slow start in the 1870s, early childhood education took place primarily in the Froebelian kindergartens for children aged about three to seven. As private or philanthropic programs, they had rapidly spread across the country during the 1880s. By 1890, however, kindergartens were being increasingly adopted by the public schools, usually for four and five year olds, with principals and superintendents unprepared for this new entry level age. By the mid-1890s, the demand for kindergarten teachers was greater than the supply, even after their training had been incorporated into the last years of high school or when graduates of normal schools were hired as kindergartners. Their knowledge of Froebel or of other contemporary theorists was often superficial. Previously, kindergarten teachers had

attended small, informal Froebelian schools in which they had not only studied a kindergarten system which emphasized learning through play but had worked under the supervision of an experienced mentor teacher. (Hewes, 1990)

We must also recognize that this period also introduced an explosion of commercially made playthings and a distribution system that made them widely available. Until the early 1800s, most toys were made at home or in the shops of craftsmen. Even in the 1840s, when Froebel's converts to the kindergarten asked for sets of his Gifts and Occupations they waited until the village carpenter could produce them. In the United States, one of the earliest companies to manufacture toys was the Milton Bradley Company, established in 1860 to make playing cards, checkers, dominoes, and other adult games. Bradley soon achieved success with the introduction of simple, colorful games specifically designed for school age children. There was a high moral tone to them. For example, the message of "The Checkered Game of Life" was that un-Christian behavior would lead inevitably to poverty, disgrace, and ruin. Churchgoers who would not have considered games for their children came to the conclusion that such recreations were not evil after all; their lessons were like those of Sunday School.

The first popular tie-in between Froebelian kindergarten curriculum and manufactured equipment was Milton Bradley's 1869 Manual for Self-Instruction and a Practical Guide for Kindergartners, renamed A Paradise of Childhood in 1896. It was written by Edward Wiebe, Bradley's neighbor in Springfield, Massachusetts. Wiebe, a music teacher who claimed to have been acquainted with Froebel and to have studied with his widow before leaving Germany a few years earlier, seems to have plagiarized the work of a young gymnastics teacher named Goldammer, who had a few years earlier translated an unauthorized French manual into German and added his own improvements. At first, Wiebe was unable to convince Bradley that his ideas were worthwhile. However, kindergarten crusader Elizabeth Peabody's talk at a local schoolhouse a few months later persuaded him to become involved with the production of kindergarten materials together with books telling how they should be used. (Wiebe, 1896. Preface.)

By the early 1880s, Milton Bradley had devised special machinery to manufacture kindergarten materials. His company standardized colored papers, crayons, and other school supplies and made an effort to eliminate their more poisonous ingredients. By the early 1880s, the company had become one of the critical players in the drama that evolved as the kindergarten slowly gained acceptance during the 1870s and rose to national scope by the 1890s.

Prang, Ernst Steiger, and a several other companies also published inexpensive books and pamphlets which showed just how the kindergarten gifts and materials should be used – and sold the "authentic" Froebelian supplies or those that were "improved" for the American market. Steiger, for example, had Elizabeth Peabody's endorsement for his advertised set of fifteen little "tracts" sent free for a three cent postage stamp. (Steiger, 1877. 36-37.) Even their catalogues included directions for the use of kindergarten materials they illustrated, usually based upon Weibe/Goldammer.

It should be emphasized that the Gifts and Occupations had never been finalized by Froebel himself and that from the beginning some American kindergartners objected to their misapplication. For example, in 1879 Elizabeth Peabody published a letter from St. Louis kindergartner Susan Blow, who had written from Europe to expose Goldammer as "a humbug and an ignoramous." And that same year, in her response to Henry Barnard about his proposed compilation of kindergarten publications, Elizabeth Peabody warned that "The interest of manufacturers and of merchants is a snare. It has already corrupted the simplicity of Fröbel in Europe and America, for his idea was to use elementary forms exclusively, and simple materials - and as much as possible of these being prepared by the children themselves." (Barnard, 1881. 15)

One way educators and school supply companies introduced new ideas and products was through exhibits at the annual meetings of the National Educational Association, which included the kindergarten advocates in its membership. In the official history of the NEA, it was noted that during the last half of the nineteenth century the exhibits at its conventions and expositions were probably more influential than advertisements in promoting the distribution of educational materials,

adding that "It is now somewhat difficult to appreciate the former enthusiasm over drawings, compositions, pictures of school buildings." (Wesley,1957. 131). Both kindergartners and manufacturers tried to exploit this potential. NEA Proceedings of the 1880s and 90s contain detailed descriptions of the Kindergarten Department's annual conference exhibits. These were not commercial displays, like those today, but were divided into work which children had actually done as part of their class activities, teaching materials prepared by their teachers, and exercises which teachers in training had been required to do in order to master the potentials inherent in the Froebelian system.

These were not small gatherings. At least five thousand persons from the United States, Canada, and foreign nations attended the 1884 meeting of the NEA in Madison, the year members of the Froebel Institute of North America re-organized as the Kindergarten Department of the NEA. (Wesley, 1957. 257) Kindergarten displays from eighteen different cities and several teacher training schools, placed so that all must walk past them,.were of "such character and influence" that the national Commissioner of Education requested a similar exhibit for the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans in the following winter. Eudora Hailmann, who had organized the Madison exhibit, continued to coordinate them at both NEA and at national and international events into the 1890s.

For those of us who wonder about what was happening in the kindergarten classrooms of this period, the descriptions of these exhibits are most illuminating. For example, at the San Francisco meeting in 1888 the Chicago kindergarten teachers included "useful charts" such as one illustrating weaving with a spider and its web in one corner, strips of cloth in the center, and a kindergarten weaving mat in the opposite corner. Work included not only standard Froebelian occupations such as sewing, slat-work, modeling, and stick inventions but also a miniature five room doll house (including a kindergarten room) which had been made and furnished by the children. The NEA reporter for that year, Nora Smith, felt that clay modeling and gift-making had been somewhat neglected and that a preference had been shown for "'fancy-work'" that was out of place. She noted that "To-day's work should naturally and logically grow from what was done

yesterday, and should clearly indicate that which must of necessity come to-morrow." (Smith, 1888. 713)

By the time of the 1890 NEA conference in St. Paul, there were only eight exhibits of kindergarten work and it was noted that interest in exhibits representing other levels of education was evidently waning. Instead of a description of displays from all educational levels, there was a rhapsodic account of kindergarten glories, of which the exhibit was "only one more noble witness to the universality, the all-comprehensiveness, hence elasticity and adaptability, of Froebel's thought." (Locke, 1890. 68)

Locke's report may have been a reaction to the highly critical Kindergarten Department address by William Hailmann. As Superintendent of Schools in La Porte, Indiana, he had instituted a Froebelian system from kindergarten through the elementary and secondary grades to normal schoool. That year, also, Eudora Hailmann was president of the Kindergarten Department and a member of the NEA Board of Directors. Both had been advocates of Froebel's system since the 1850s, had organized the Froebel Institute of North America in 1882, and had been instrumental in the formation of a Kindergarten Department within the NEA in 1884. They co-edited the primary Frobelian periodical, The New Education, and authored numerous books and pamphlets describing their version of the active learning through play that Froebel and other educators from Comenius onward had advocated.

The Hailmanns vigorously supported the concept of developmental freedom and opposed the dictated activities and the network drawing that were prescribed in such detail in books published by Milton Bradley and E. Steiger. For example, in his Primary Methods (1887) William Hailmann had recommended non-commercial materials, such as clay dug locally. Although he recognized the preference of children for colored papers, he pointed out that white paper previously used for older children's penmanship practice could later be used by the kindergarten children for their folding exercises. Like Froebel, he recommended that older students make some of the kindergarten materials like colored paper cutout shapes or the little sticks used to lay out shapes and beginning letters.

At this 1890 meeting, William Hailmann spoke on "Schoolishness in the Kindergarten" and condemned their rote use of manufactured Froebelian Gifts and Occupations. He saw the symptoms of schoolishness in such things as "the learning of a new game when it is learned for its own sake. .. . memorized in thoughtless parroty fashion" or of a new Gift which is studied in a rote, repressive exercise that crushes all sponaneity and interest. He objected to the pedantic authoritarian routines which compel children to do or not to do, without reason or necessity, and cited such examples as a little girl who had to undo her entire weaving-mat and begin over because she had put one strip in from the left instead of from the right and a teacher who spent a futile ten minutes trying to get every child to "'stand perfectly still and toes on line'" before beginning a game. Also serious, he believed, was the isolation of children into distinct one foot squares of table space with no interaction in tasks requiring united effort. And, to wind up his analysis of the way a majority of kindergartens were operated, he said that the depth of schoolishness was reached in the construction of programs and time-tables, with children going to kindergarten just to study the gifts in sequence during days cut up into "a fixed number of minutes for each predetermined kind of happiness, guiding the work by external circumstance, instead of the inner needs of the children." All of these examples, and more, must be corrected if there were to be "a new education, not of self-contraction but of self-expansion, by which . . . man may realize his destiny." (Hailmann, 1890. 565-573) Such a talk, given by an acknowledged leader of Froebelian education, must have been seen as a direct threat to the publishers who were promoting such a system, selling the materials being condemned, and publishing directions for their didactic use.

The following year, 1891, the NEA International Convention met in Toronto. Eudora Hailmann made a strong effort, primarily through the pages of The New Education, to have a display that would demonstrate innovative methods from a wide variety of programs. The published Exhibit Report was lengthy and detailed. The Chicago Free Kindergarten Association illustrated nature study, including children's recorded observations of plant growth from seed to fruit. Color, Number, and Form were shown by such things as flowers categorized in

groups (sets) according to the number of petals. There were "different illustrations of one song in pasting, painting, sticks, and rings, suggesting limitless possibilities in conventionalizing such natural forms as grass, flowers, birds, and butterflies. The dandelion series showed the work of the sunlight in a most impressive and interesting way with the blue-print photographs." Bird life was studied in these Chicago kindergartens with pictures showing birds working as masons or carpenters in building their homes, followed by the children's products from the same activities. The reporter describing the kindergarten exhibibits said that "One can see at a glance the scientific and educational value of such work, which shows that the child's creativity and growing powers have been developed, rather than the possiblities of the materials."

This 1891 Toronto Kindergarten exhibit, from "the first efforts of baby fingers" up to advanced work of older children, was described as "marking an epoch in the history of all exhibits" and was said to be "conspicuous in intricate designs of practical value and utility" such as "beautiful calendars, picture-frames, blotters, pen-wipers, etc." The demonstration work of teachers, described as "a model of accuracy and originality," brought out possibilities of different materials in most beautiful forms and coloring. "Their work with peas and sticks was particularly noticeable, and the use of different colored sticks in the different designs was most effective."

The courtyard full of Froebelian work from Hamilton, Ontario, arranged in ascending order of the school grades, showed "children's free inventions in all divisions of work that impress one with the true development of creative ability, stamped upon all the different materials in use. Paper folding, cutting and weaving, outline and school sewing, clay-modelling, drawing and coloring, all vie with each other in completeness of execution and design."

The displays at Toronto included some from beyond North America, with one from the Tokyo kindergartens which "astonished its numerous admirers by the skill of workmanship and the characteristic individuality of its workers." Another popular display showed the use of kindergarten materials with special needs children, with a large photograph of their kindergarten classroom supplementing the work

done by children in a Canadian Institution for the Blind, which was said to be indistinguishable from that of others.

The following year, in 1891, brand names first appeared in the NEA reports. From the Hailmann's La Porte kindergartens, the the study of colors was initiated with tablets such as those later popularized by Montessori. These were of different shapes and made of thin wood covered with the "pure color paper produced by the Milton Bradley Company." Alone, or at tables for four, children applied color relationships by creating designs and "the educative value of this social work, which Superintendent Hailman considers indispensable, was well shown in the evidence of rapid gain in discovery indicated. The gradual but sure growth of the children out of the half-savage pleasure in glowing contrasts into the deeper injoyment of softer blendings was clearly shown, and in this development the social work was evidently the chief factor." In addition to the use of Bradley's colored paper, the La Porte schools also displayed work on white painting paper ruled into half inch squares that was produced by the Nicholas Company of Rochester. It was noted that although teacher dictated work initiated this activity, it was "used merely as a starting point for spontaneous work."

Although most of the exhibits were prepared by schools, there was also an extensive exhibit - described as "comprehensive and thoroughly sequential - by the Prang Course of Study. Various geometric forms were studied and then copied in clay models by younger children. Older children, using patterns, copied forms to make paper models. Under this sequenced plan, drawing was divided into three subjects. Construction meant drawing the shapes, while Representation was the grouping of those shapes into "good pictorial composition" and Decoration.led to "fine drawings of Historic Ornament." (Newcombe, 1891. 49-54) In the detailed description of this carefully sequenced and teacher directed course of study, we see the elements of what is usually viewed as the didactic Froebelian kindergarten system in this country.

In an editorial comment in the September 1893 issue of <u>The New Education</u>, Hailmann was even more specific than he had been at the 1890 NEA meeting. He deplored the hypocrisy of having salaried agents

of manufacturers and publishers speaking at the Chicago Educational Congress which had been held in conjunction with the great Columbia Exposition the previous year. He continued, " . . . these salaried agents of the publishers of systems and appliances assume the garb of progress, claim to be true enthusiastic defenders of the true interests of childhood, tacitly implying that their petrified systems and nostrums are built upon the considerations for which they plead. Thus are the unwary caught and the true friends of childhood thwarted or hindered in their work and the god of merchants and thieves is glorified."

It should not have been surprising that the 1896 Quarter Century Edition of The Paradise of Childhood omitted both William and Eurodra Hailmann from its historical account of the American kindergarten. However, in a letter to Milton Bradley immediately after he received his copy, William Hailmann wrote:

> It is difficult for me to understand what good motive could provoke so great an insult. It seems rather strange, does it not, that the writer of the first acceptable book but one, the person who first succeeded in attracting the attention of the N.E.A. to the kindergarten, who organized the Kindergarten Department of the N.E.A. and for a number of years labored successfully to 'pull it through,' who for seven years edited and published the New Education and Kindergarten Messenger, who established the first kindergarten in what was then the West should be absolutely ignored in your history of the movement. Strange, too, that Mrs. Hailmann who helped me faithfully in all these things, who practically introduced the Kindergarten in Milwaukee and Detroit, who was the first to establish a free training school and who has given to the field a number of excellent workers, and to whom your house is indebted for many good suggestions, should find herself read out of the work and dismissed with a line at Washington, as 'the wife of the national superintendent of the Indian Schools.' Moreover, my personal successful efforts to adapt the kindergarten to the primary schoool seems to be wholly unknown to your writer, although at one time the booming influence upon your sales as a direct result of my constant efforts in summer schools and the N.E.A. was

acknowledged. The fact, too, that Indiana was the first state - and through my effort - to make the Kgt. a state institution, and what I accomplished for the work at and through LaPorte, does not exist for your historian. If such a book had been published Boston or St. Louis, I could have explained its offensive attitude, but coming from the Milton Bradley Co. who partly do know better and partly might know better, it is amazing to me.

Although outside the scope of this paper, the power of publishing companies over educators can be illustrated by a later and unrelated incident also recounted by William Hailmann. After serving as the federal Superintendent of Indian Schools during Grover Cleveland's term as president, he assumed the superintentency of the Dayton (Ohio) schools in 1898. Within weeks after his arrival was visited by a local politician named Hanley who represented the American Book Company, then a major textbook publisher. Hanley asserted that he had been instrumental in having the previous superintendent dismissed for non-cooperation and he made it clear that Hailmann would suffer the same fate unless he cooperated. For two years, Hanley "created intermittent episodes" dealing with school administration, but there were so many dissenting factions in Dayton that none could dominate. By the spring of 1901 the Hanley clique gained almost half of the board positions and in 1902 Hailmann resigned. (Hailmann, 1902)

For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, William Hailmann and the Froebelian kindergarten had little direct influence upon American education after the mid-1890s. Many factors, including a major economic depression and the closing of kindergarten training schools in the mid-1890s, contributed to this. After the first mention of the Prang display at the 1891 conference, there appear to have been continuous exhibits of commercial products on into the 20th century. Examination of the NEA treasurer's reports indicates that no fees were charged for this display space, but one wonders about behind-the-scenes arrangements such as those Hailmann reported from Dayton. After the great Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892, major innovations such as the magic lantern and the ditto machine were introduced, the displays of children's accomplishments dwindled to almost none.

By 1900, there was no longer mention of an exhibits chairman or an exhibit report in the annual NEA proceedings. It is, however, interesting to note that when Maria Montessori spoke to the NEA at its 1915 meeting she continued the protest much as the Froebelians might have when she asked whether giving the child something which is the product of the adult imagination was going to develop the imagination of the child. In context of her concern, I believe that she would have joined in our applause for the concerned member had she been at our NAEYC Conference of 1989.

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